

CARMARTHENSHIRE Nature Notes

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Nature Partnership

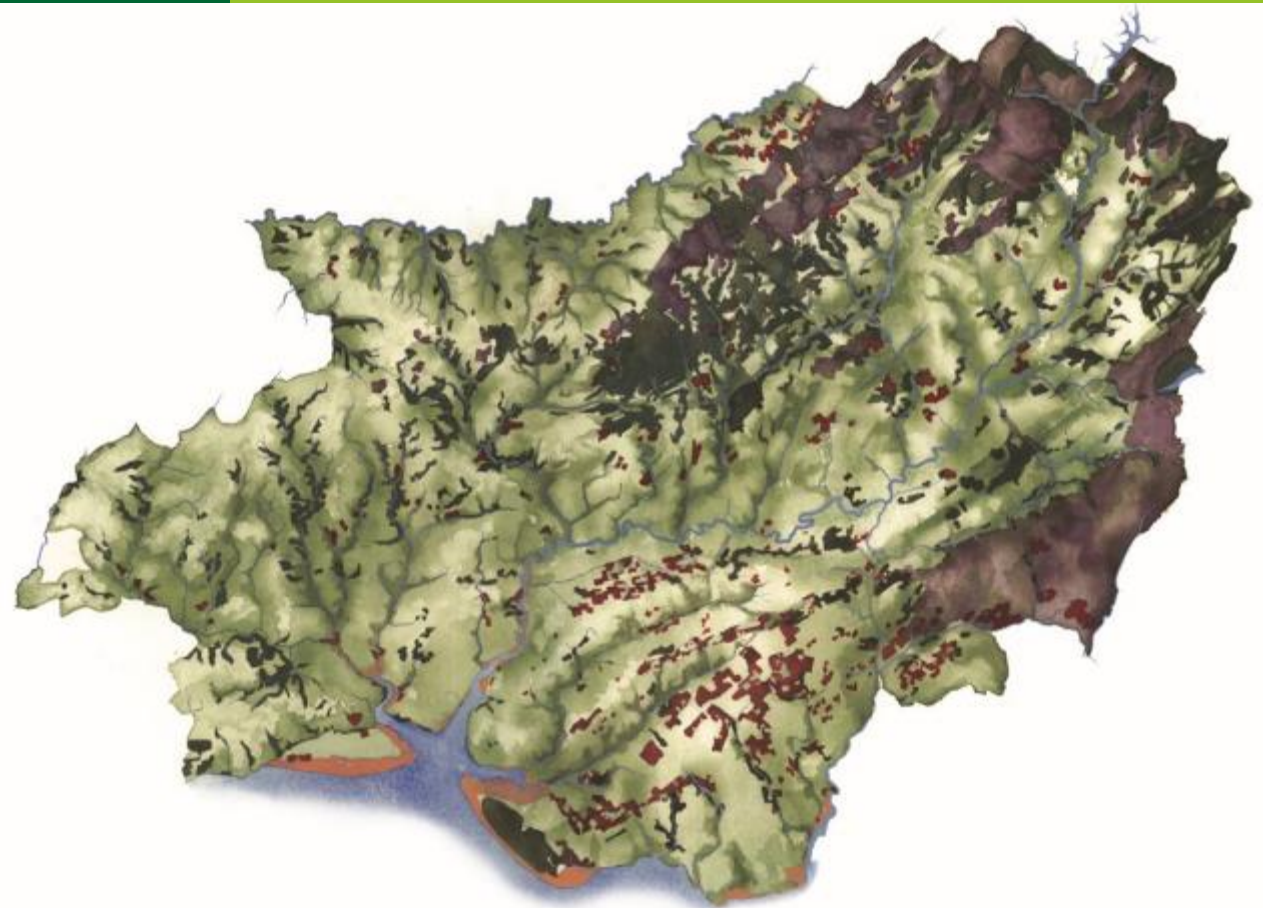


APRIL-JUNE 2022

Carmarthenshire has some wonderful wildlife. These 'Nature Notes' are some highlights to encourage us all to take a closer look around us – even the common is special. Seen anything interesting – then why not send us a photo?



For more information about nature in the county
read our Nature Recovery Plan:
carmarthenshire.gov.wales/biodiversity



Send your photos to: Biodiversity@carmarthenshire.gov.uk



Heath spotted-orchid

The heath spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) is one of Carmarthenshire's more common orchids where its damp grassland habitat survives. This is one of a difficult group of orchid species that readily hybridises, leading to many intermediate forms; the species also exhibit a wide range of variation in colour. Pollinated by a variety of insects orchids produce many thousands of very tiny seeds that are aptly described as 'dust seeds'. They are dependent on fungi present in the soil to help them by providing the energy necessary to germinate.



Reedbeds

Reedbeds are an important natural habitat. They support many native species, including important birds (e.g. warblers), wetland plants, invertebrates, (e.g. dragonflies) and mammals (e.g. otter and water vole). They form part of a healthy and functional landscape.

Reedbeds are also important for people. They provide us with fresh water by filtering out pollution and can act as water storage areas that reduce flood risk. However, wetland habitats have declined greatly.

In Carmarthenshire they can occur as small areas of habitat on the fringes of waterbodies and therefore are often quite fragmented. Along the coastline from Bynea to Kidwelly there are a number of small examples of reedbed. However, Witchett Pool at Laugharne Burrows and Ffrwd Fen near Pinged have large areas of reedbed. Our estuaries also support areas of reedbed such as the extensive area at Llangennech, overlooking the Loughor estuary.



Violet oil beetle

Once widespread across the UK today the distribution of the violet oil beetle (*Meloe violaceus*) has declined – likely because of their dependence on semi-natural grasslands. Eggs are dug in burrows and the juvenile beetles are tiny. They emerge in spring and lie in wait on flowers for solitary mining bees that visit flowers. These larvae hitch a lift on the back of the bee back to their nest and then eat the food the bee brings back for its young – in a similar way to a young cuckoo!



Pollen beetles

Pollen beetles are small (2-3mm) black beetles with a metallic sheen. There are several very similar species of pollen beetles. They can be a pest on commercial oil seed rape crops. Researchers have been experimenting with growing field margins and insect refuges sown with wild flowers so natural predators of the pollen beetle can thrive. These have shown that pollen beetle numbers were reduced a year after planting and refuges and could reduce the use of pesticides to control the beetles.



Pollination

Bees feed on and require both nectar and pollen. The nectar is for energy and the pollen provides protein and other nutrients. Most pollen is used by bees as food for their larvae, but bees also transfer it from plant-to-plant, providing the pollination services needed by plants which we all benefit from. Like us bees need variety in their diet. The more flower sources available to bees the better - wildflowers, trees, shrubs, hedgerows are all important.



Bramble leaf mining moths

The bramble leaf mining moth (*Stigmella aurella*) is found throughout the UK. The leaf mines are made by the moth larvae which excavate meandering tunnels (mines) just below the surface of blackberry leaves. The larvae spend the winter inside the mine and then come to the surface to pupate before emerging as a moth. The mines get bigger and wider as the larva grows.



Sausage beard lichen

Sausage beard lichen (*Usnea articulata*) is one of Wales' most spectacular lichens. Often 30-40 cm long, it can grow more than 1 metre in length. It has a messy, beard-like appearance, with hanging tufts that flap in the wind. It is easily recognised because of its unique 'string of sausages' appearance - the swollen 'stems' have narrow pinch-points and look sausage-like.

Industrial pollution caused a decline but now it seems to be spreading again, and more new sites are identified each year. There are three main habitats: hawthorns in windy places; the leeward side of windy larch plantations; and willow tops in wetlands. Other records come from oak and rowan trees.



Water voles

Usually water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) excavate extensive burrow systems into the banks of waterways. However, in wet, rushy areas, water voles can make woven nests, above ground (about 20cm wide) above ground amongst tussocks. They have done this at a site the Council is managing for water voles in Llanelli. Ponds were opened up near ditches where water voles were already recorded and they have moved into this area. Here banks for burrowing don't exist so they are using above-ground nests. Further survey this summer should reveal more and help guide future management.



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Beautiful demoiselle

The beautiful demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*) are not dragonflies but are in fact large damselflies. Like other damselflies, they typically hold their wings in a closed position at rest. The males are blue and the females green. The males rest on bankside vegetation and when a female passes use their fluttering flight as a courtship display.

Ironically this striking damselfly spends most of its life under water as a larva. It emerges only for a few weeks to live on fast-flowing water as adults.

Both larvae and adults are predators – they adults hunting on the wing using their excellent eyesight.



Green tiger beetle

The green tiger beetle (*Cicindela campestris*) is a fast, agile predator found throughout the UK. Easily recognisable by their green colour and yellow spots they can be seen between April and September. Their long legs make them agile runners and their large eyes help them catch their prey – they feed on other invertebrates such as spiders and caterpillars. They will fly short distances making an buzzing sound in flight.

Green tiger beetles prefer areas of bare ground with little vegetation. They are most commonly seen in warm and sandy habitats in heaths, hillsides and dunes and also ex industrial sites.



Managing sites for pollinators

This year even more people are managing areas for pollinators. The Council is using cut and collect machinery bought using WG funding through their Local Places for Nature project to trial the management of some previously regularly mown sites for pollinators. Some areas around housing sites around will be cut once every 4-5 weeks allowing low-growing flowering plants such as clover, self heal and daisy to flower; others will only be cut twice a year. Here in Cross Hands you can already see the benefits – outside the business units orchids are blooming. The mown grass will be removed – either left on site in habitat piles or taken to the green waste site. The latter takes extra time and resources so the trial this summer will help inform how the council expands this way of working in future years.



Establishing newly planted trees

Tree planting is popular and in the right place beneficial for people and wildlife. But it must be done properly and with care. The success of planting will depend on choosing the right species for the site and on providing an environment in which the young trees will thrive.

Trees need care to establish them in their chosen site and this takes some time and effort.

Once planted, an area around each tree must be kept weed-free for at least 3 years. This is really important - trees have a much better chance for survival if time and attention is paid to their establishment.

These trees were planted at Parc Dewi Sant in Carmarthen Nov/Dec 2020 but are still being cared for. Recently, stakes and ties were removed and the mulched area around the base of the tree weeded and re-mulched with a thick layer of loose bark mulch over the mulch mat. Some pruning was undertaken where necessary.

Stakes prevent wind rock and movement of the roots which can damage them and slow down establishment.

If ties become too tight and/or are not removed will stop the trunk expanding and lead to weak, vulnerable trees.



Late Spring

Wet weather can quickly arise. Here the rain is rapidly moving eastwards – but soon passed over.



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